Chamber Music Conversations from the Clark
2020 – 21 Season

Gryphon Trio

December 13, 2020

Annalee Patipatanakoon, *violin*
Roman Borys, *cello*
Jamie Parker, *piano*

PROGRAM

Host

Rogers Brubaker, Professor of Sociology, UCLA

Prerecorded Concert

Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847)
Piano Trio No. 2 in C-minor, op. 66

Allegro energico e con fuoco
Andante espressivo
Molto allegro quasi presto
Allegro appassionato

(Franz) Josef Haydn (1732–1809)
Piano Trio in A Major, Hob. XV:18

Allegro moderato
Andante
Allegro

Q&A

Rogers Brubaker

Bruce Whiteman, Clark Librarian Emeritus

Annalee Patipatanakoon, Roman Borys, Jamie Parker,
members of Gryphon Trio

PROGRAM NOTES

Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847)
Piano Trio No. 2 in C-minor, op. 66

Mendelssohn wrote only two piano trios, and they are both late works in Mendelssohnian terms. The second, in C minor, was written in 1845 when the composer was thirty-five years old, and it is in every way a characteristic composition. Mozart could not have written it, although its formal assumptions would have been completely comprehensible to him. Brahms or Schumann (who wrote very favorably about Mendelssohn's first Trio of 1839) could also not have written the work, and they might have found it formally a little predictable. Perhaps no nineteenth-century composer but Mendelssohn would have inserted a foursquare Protestant *Kirchenlied* into the finale, with the possible exception of Meyerbeer, whose setting of the *Ad nos, ad salutarem undam* (admittedly a Catholic text, but set to a tune that Mendelssohn might have envied) in his opera *La Prophète* was later used by Liszt for a brilliant organ fantasy. Mendelssohn, like Meyerbeer, was a German Jew as well as a fellow pupil of Carl Friedrich Zelter; but Mendelssohn's father, whose own father Moses was a well-known philosopher, decided to convert the entire family to Christianity. Felix was only seven years old when he was baptized in Berlin, and the effects of this conversion were deeply felt and lifelong.

The C-minor Trio is in four movements. The opening sonata-allegro sounds more than a little like Beethoven, especially its first theme; but the second theme in E-flat major is very much Mendelssohn's own. The development section employs both groups of melodic material mainly in the violin and cello, while the piano supports them with arpeggiated figures that emerge out of the short bursts of descending arpeggios used earlier in the movement. The piano writing is surprisingly 'unvirtuosic' in light of the extremely demanding piano part in Mendelssohn's first Trio, although the coda breaks into some octaves in both hands that are modestly difficult. (Such octave writing was not so clichéd in 1845 as it would later become in the hands of composers like Liszt and Rachmaninoff.)

The Andante movement is in the relative key of E-flat major, and like many of Mendelssohn's slow pieces, this one is at heart a song without words. The piano part never lets up, and above it the other two instruments elaborate a charming vocalise. The third movement is one of Mendelssohn's characteristic scherzos

in the manner of the great third movement of the Octet, op. 20 (written when the composer was sixteen) or the Overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Even the middle-section trio of this movement is dominated by the quick sixteenth-note figurations in the piano part, and the fast tempo combined with the mainly pianissimo dynamic markings create an elfin spirit that is uniquely Mendelssohn's own.

The finale provides a passionate ending to the Trio. Mendelssohn's harmonic vocabulary is never particularly adventurous, and here the two central themes are again in C minor and E-flat major. A third theme in A flat appears beginning at bar 128, and this is the chorale *Von deinen Thron*, a tune which dates to the middle of the sixteenth century. (The theme is not dissimilar to the sequence used by Chopin in the middle section of his C-sharp minor Scherzo of 1839, which piano students have long likened to the drinking song *How Dry I Am*). The chorale reappears at the climax of the finale, now in C major, in a passage of almost orchestral richness. Mendelssohn was perhaps the most optimistic composer of the nineteenth century, and the simple structure of the chorale helps to bring this Trio to a brilliant and optimistic conclusion.

(Franz) Josef Haydn (1732–1809)
Piano Trio in A Major, Hob. XV:18

Despite calling them, with understandable exaggeration, "some of the greatest music ever written," Charles Rosen glumly claims in his book *The Classical Style* that "the Haydn trios are doomed." They are doomed, he believes, because they are not true trios, with three parts contributing uniquely to the harmonic and linear structure of the piece. The cello is rarely given an independent line. Rather, it acts like a continuo instrument in the traditional baroque trio-sonata, doubling the bass line in the piano part and thus adding little more than its timbre to the composition. And if the cello is a sort of slave in these trios, the violin is a second-class citizen, playing only the more lyrical bits that the piano of Haydn's day could not sustain, although the modern grand piano certainly can. In Rosen's rather narrow view, the Haydn trios—all twenty-six, or thirty-one, or even more, depending on how you count—are really piano works with accompaniment, of interest only to pianists. All the same, they are played and recorded with enthusiasm.

Haydn's trios stand in company with Mozart's six (K.502 and K.542 are considered especially fine) and with Beethoven's three of op. 1 as among the earliest examples of the genre still in the

modern repertoire. Almost half of them were written after Haydn turned sixty and are, therefore, mature works. Even so, as a form the trios have neither had quite the same influence, nor enjoyed the renown, of Haydn's string quartets and symphonies. But they are not thereby doomed to silence, and should not be.

The eighteenth of Haydn's trios is in A major and is one of a set of three dedicated to the Princess Dowager Maria Theresia Esterházy, written in the early 1790s and published in 1794. The music presents Haydn at his most charming and, in the final movement, his most unbuttoned. ("Nor was Haydn ever spared the charge of rowdiness even in his ripest works," wrote Donald Francis Tovey in his well-known essay of 1929 on Haydn's chamber music.) The opening Allegro moderato is a characteristic sonata-form movement. Both the first theme of the exposition and the second subject (dominated by triplets and running passages in the piano and the violin) are used in the short development section. There Haydn enriches the harmonic resources of the movement with excursions into new keys. We would expect F-sharp minor (as the relative minor of the home key of A); Haydn, however, takes us elsewhere, towards E-flat—whether in the major or minor mode is not certain—then surprises us by landing instead in the key of C-sharp minor, just before the recapitulation. The repetition of both halves of this first movement gives it a formal clarity and pleasing bilateral symmetry.

The slow second movement has the feeling of a set of variations, but in fact it is in ABA form. A plangent eight-bar theme in A minor is repeated and followed by eight further bars that start out in C major but return to A minor. (Such a scheme would indeed constitute a typical theme for a set of variations.) The B section is in A major and does seem a kind of elaboration, though not quite a variation, on the harmonic and textural characteristics of the A section. Overall this middle section is markedly improvisatory and it is easy to imagine a pianist of Beethoven's abilities inventing further variants of the musical material; but Haydn declines to take this step and instead brings back the A section, with some added filigree, before concluding the movement. The spirited finale in A major is neither a rondo nor a sonata, although it bears the marks of both in its way. It has, as Haydn's finales often do, something of a Hungarian character, largely due to Haydn's use of syncopation and terpsichorean appoggiaturas. It makes an altogether captivating conclusion to the piece.

ABOUT GRYPHON TRIO

Front cover and above photo credit: Bo Huang

Gryphon Trio is firmly established as one of the world's preeminent piano trios. For more than 25 years, it has earned acclaim for and impressed international audiences with its highly refined, dynamic, and memorable performances. The Trio's repertoire ranges from traditional to contemporary, and from European classicism to modern-day multimedia. It is committed to redefining chamber music for the 21st century. Violinist Annalee Patipatanakoon, cellist Roman Borys, and pianist Jamie Parker are creative innovators with an appetite for discovery and new ideas. They have commissioned over 85 new works, and they frequently collaborate with other artists on projects that push the boundaries of Classical music.

The Trio tours regularly throughout North America and Europe. It enjoys longstanding relationships with prominent arts incubators and presenters like Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity, Orford Music Academy, Music Toronto, Ottawa Chamberfest, and Festival del Lago International Academy of Music in Ajijic, Mexico. Gryphon Trio often performs triple concerti with the world's major symphony orchestras and smaller chamber orchestras.

Gryphon Trio's prolific recording catalogue includes 22 releases on Analekta, Naxos, and other labels; it is an encyclopedia of works for the genre. Honors include 11 nominations and

three Juno Awards for Classical Album of the Year in 2004, 2011, and most recently in 2019. In 2013, Canada Council for the Arts presented Gryphon Trio with the prestigious Walter Carsen Prize for Excellence in the Performing Arts.

The Gryphons are deeply committed to community engagement, education, and the development of next-generation audiences and performers. They conduct masterclasses and workshops at universities and conservatories. They are artists-in-residence at the University of Toronto's Faculty of Music and Trinity College. Since 2010, the Trio's ground-breaking outreach program, Listen Up!, has inspired 16 Canadian communities to collaborate on large-scale multifaceted arts creation projects. The Trio leads Orford Music Academy's Piano Trio Workshop and directs the Classical Music Summer Programs at Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity.

Roman Borys is Artistic and Executive Director of the Ottawa Chamber Music Society, and Annalee Patipatanakoon and Jamie Parker serve as OCMS' Artistic Advisors. Mr. Parker is the Rupert E. Edwards Chair in Piano Performance at the University of Toronto Faculty of Music, and Ms. Patipatanakoon is Associate Professor of Violin and Performance Area Chair of Strings.

https://gryphontrio.com/

Gryphon Trio is represented by MKI Artists:
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ABOUT BRUCE WHITEMAN

Bruce Whiteman has been writing the program notes for the *Chamber Music at the Clark* series since 1998. He was Head Librarian at UCLA's Clark Library from 1996–2010, and is now a full-time poet, writer, and translator. He lives in Canada.

CHAMBER MUSIC CONVERSATIONS FROM THE CLARK

Previous performances in this series are available to view on the Center for 17th-& 18th-Century Studies' Youtube channel: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCbqHRq2d7cM5kobB27Hs4vA

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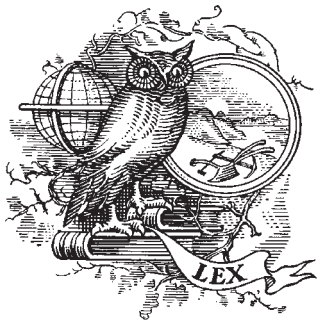

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In 1926 philanthropist William Andrews Clark Jr. donated his library of rare books to the burgeoning UCLA campus in honor of his father, a copper magnate and United States senator from Montana. The William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, a unique resource for the humanities, today includes major holdings in English literature and history (1580–1820) and fine printing, as well as the world's most comprehensive collection of the works of Oscar Wilde, attracting scholars throughout the world. The library hosts a range of activities, including scholarly lectures and conferences, theatrical performances, and music concerts—organized by the UCLA Center for 17th- & 18th-Century Studies. The acclaimed *Chamber Music at the Clark* series honors the musical passion of William Andrews Clark Jr., an accomplished violinist and founder of the Los Angeles Philharmonic.